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California Postsecondary Education Commission

University Eligibility: Are Locally Reported Figures Comparable to the Commission's Estimates?

The Commission periodically releases university eligibility rates for California high school graduates. These figures, which are based on a review of transcripts collected from schools, show the percentage of high school graduates who meet the admission requirements of the University of California and the California State University. The Commission's most recent estimates showed that in 2003, 14.4% of California public high school graduates were eligible for UC and 28.8% were eligible for CSU.

Eligibility figures for counties or school districts are sometimes reported in the press. These are generally based on data reported by school districts to the California Department of Education and show the percentage of high school graduates who have completed the *a-g* college preparatory curriculum. However, not all students who complete the *a-g* courses are eligible for UC or CSU. Eligibility also depends on a student's grades and scores on the SAT or ACT college entrance tests. Actual eligibility rates are normally lower than reported *a-g* completions.

The Commission compared the eligibility results for the schools in the 2003 study with the reported *a-g* completion rates for these schools. The main findings were as follows:

- **CSU eligibility is about 78% of *a-g* completions.** The relationship is not exact, but is close enough for a local CSU eligibility rate to be estimated from the average *a-g* completion rate in the area.
- **UC eligibility varies greatly between schools.** The relationship between UC eligibility and *a-g* completions is less straightforward. At schools where less than half the students take the *a-g* courses, UC eligibility is about 35% of *a-g* completions. But at schools with higher *a-g* completion rates, UC eligibility is much higher.
- **UC eligibility cannot be estimated reliably from *a-g* completions.** Because UC eligibility does not increase in simple proportion to *a-g* completions, UC eligibility cannot be estimated reliably from the local *a-g* completion rate. If there is a need to estimate a local eligibility rate from data regularly reported by schools, *a-g* completions must be combined with other data, such as the percentage of students taking college entrance tests.

Inequities Between Schools

The sharp increase in UC eligibility at schools with high *a-g* completions is a reminder of the inequities in access to higher education. This echoes other analyses done by the Commission. One recent report (see page 4) showed that UC eligibility rises steeply as a school's Academic Performance Index (API) increases above 750. These high-performing schools tend to be in more affluent areas. The wide gap in UC eligibility between these schools and schools at the other end of the scale is a persistent problem, particularly since most African American and Latino students attend schools that have low API scores and offer less opportunity to take the *a-g* courses and the college entrance tests that are required by the University.

The Commission is now planning an eligibility study for the high school graduating class of 2007. This study will cover more schools than the 2003 study, allowing a closer examination of how and why university eligibility varies from school to school.

CSU Eligibility and *a-g* Completions

The Commission's eligibility studies are based on a sample of student transcripts collected from high schools throughout the state. Each transcript is reviewed by university staff to see if the pattern of courses, grades, and test scores would make the student eligible for admission. Statewide eligibility rates are estimated from this sample. For the 2003 eligibility study, the Commission collected transcripts for the entire graduating class of 48 randomly selected high schools.

Comparing the eligibility results for these schools with *a-g* completions shows that CSU eligibility is, on average, 78% of the *a-g* completion rate reported to the California Department of Education. This is not an exact relationship. At some schools, CSU eligibility is more than 78% of the reported *a-g* completion rate and at others it is below this figure.

Table 1 shows figures for some of the schools in the sample. School 2 reported that 98% of its graduates had completed the *a-g* courses, yet the review of transcripts for this school showed that its CSU eligibility was only 63%. School 1 reported a lower figure for *a-g* completions, but its CSU eligibility rate was higher than the rate for School 2.

Table 1. University Eligibility and *a-g* Completions

School	a-g completion rate	Eligibility rate	
		CSU	UC
Four highest schools in the Commission's eligibility study			
School 1	84%	70%	63%
School 2	98	63	43
School 3	70	59	40
School 4	56	54	41
Four lowest schools in the Commission's eligibility study			
School 45	16%	13.4%	6.0%
School 46	24	11.6	4.7
School 47	4	4.4	2.9
School 48	0	0.9	0

Eligibility rates from the Commission's 2003 University Eligibility study. Reported *a-g* completion rates from the California Department of Education.

Figures are approximated to protect the identity of the schools participating in the study.

Table 2 shows the best estimate and likely range of eligibility rates at various levels of *a-g* completion rates. The best estimate is based on a trend line fitted to the results for all 48 schools in the study sample (see graphs on page 3). The likely range is based on the way results for individual schools depart from the overall trend line.

These figures in the table can be used to estimate a CSU eligibility rate for a county or school district from the average *a-g* completion rate in the area. For example, if 40% of students in the area have completed the *a-g* curriculum, the CSU eligibility rate would be about 30%.

UC Eligibility and *a-g* Completions

Test scores play an important part in UC eligibility, so there is not a straight-line relationship between *a-g* completions and UC eligibility. At schools where the *a-g* completion rate is below 45%, UC eligibility is about one third of the *a-g* completion rate. As *a-g* rates increase beyond this level, UC eligibility climbs sharply. At schools where the reported *a-g* completion rate is above 55%, UC eligibility is 50–60% of the *a-g* completion rate.

The high eligibility rates at schools with higher *a-g* completions occurs because more students at these schools take the tests required by UC, particularly the SAT II. The Commission's review of courses, grades, and test scores for the students in the 2003 eligibility study sample showed that the SAT II is the most important single factor limiting eligibility for students who meet most, but not all, of UC's requirements.

Table 2. School Eligibility Rates as Estimated From *a–g* Completion Rates

School's <i>a–g</i> completion rate	CSU eligibility		UC eligibility	
	Best estimate	Likely range	Best estimate	Likely range
20%	16%	9–23%	8%	0–17%
30	23	16–30	10	1–21
40	31	24–38	14	4–24
50	39	32–46	–	–
60	47	40–54	–	–
70	55	48–62	–	–

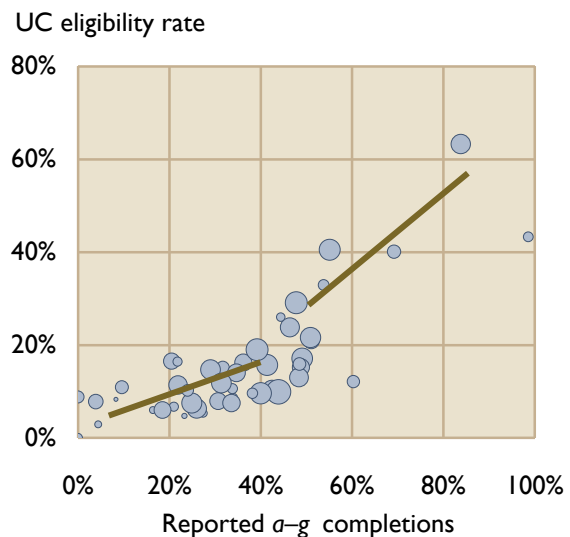
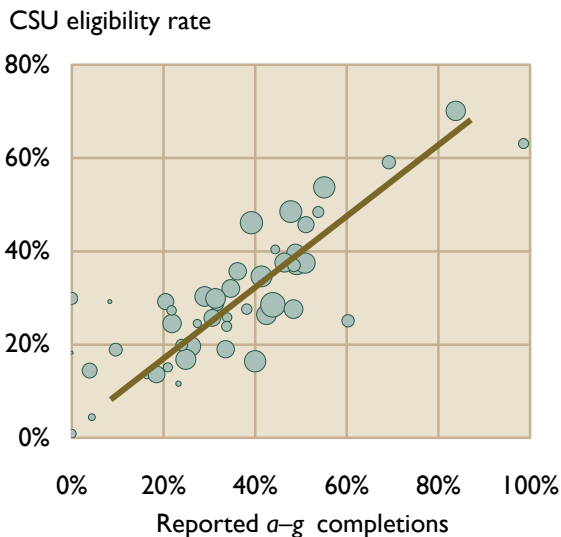
The likely range is the 50% confidence interval. There is a 50% chance that the true value lies within the likely range.

UC eligibility cannot be estimated reliably from *a–g* completions when the *a–g* completion rate is above about 40%.

Because test taking varies so much between schools, a local UC eligibility cannot always be estimated reliably from *a–g* completions. If all schools in a county or school district have *a–g* completion rates of 40% or less, the average UC eligibility rate is likely to be 30–40% of the average *a–g* rate, or about half of the CSU eligibility rate. If the area includes schools with higher *a–g* completion rates, the overall UC eligibility rate is likely to be higher, but the exact figure depends too much on test-taking patterns to be estimated as a percentage of *a–g* completions.

Actual Eligibility Rates and Reported *a–g* Completions

Schools in the Commission's 2003 Eligibility Study



Data points show the eligibility rate and the reported *a–g* completion rate for each school in the Commission's 2003 eligibility study.

Size of each data point is proportional to the number of graduates at the school. Lines are trend lines fitted to the data by Commission staff.

Commission Reports on University Eligibility

The Impact of the High School Academic Performance Index (API) on Student Eligibility. March 2006.

Regional Differences in University Eligibility. November 2005.

University Eligibility Study for the Class of 2001. September 2005.

Factors Limiting Eligibility for the University of California. December 2004.

University Eligibility Study for the Class of 2003. May 2004.

See **www.cpec.ca.gov/eligibility** for links to these reports and other
Commission publications